



University of Iowa

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Ambidextrous

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Panel: The Sound of Your Words, the Line on Your Screen: Hybrid Media

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Everyone who knows me knows that I play guitar with my right hand and write with my left. When I write my stories, I need a kind of raw material that only popular songs can give me. Through intuition, I approach my texts in an auditory way. I emphasize the rhythm, the rhyme, and pauses. It's like transcribing sound, a melodic voice that tells you something and won't leave you in peace until you leave it written. That's how I've "composed" my two books of prose: *Crónicamente Caracas* [Chronically Caracas] (2008) and *Dinero fácil* [Easy Money] (2014).

For as much as my creative work is experimental in character, in general I don't consider literature music, nor music literature. I just cultivate two distinct modes of expression, with distinct techniques and traditions. More specifically, two genres: stories and songs. The first interests me as a sound object, and the second as a literary artifact.

The latter is the musical genre I'm most passionate about studying: the union of music and text. There are Spanish-speaking songwriters like Joaquín Sabina, or, more recently, Jorge Drexler, who have lifted the genre to limits bordering on literature. Emboldened by them and by the rest of my musical library, I studied Letters with a simple premise: to improve the lyrics of my own songs.

To this day, in my projects, I normally combine resources of both mediums. It's the method that has been the most effective for me up to this point.

I'm not worried about whether this bitonality lends profundity to my texts. I doubt, moreover, that this tic of mixing things helps my work be more successful or get more internet traffic. And that's why I'm the first to ask myself, what the devil does all this mixed media mean? I don't have just one answer. I guess it would be ridiculous to live in this 2.0 era as if we didn't live in it; today, every object is a mosaic of various mediums.

I think, for example, about the book/academic aptitude test *Facsímil*, translated as *Multiple Choice* (2015), by the Chilean author Alejandro Zambra. Or the picture book/idea vignettes *Ultraviolencia* [Ultraviolence] (2012) by Miguel Noguera of Catalonia. And the bestseller *Modern Love* (2015), in which the North American comedian Aziz Ansari and sociologist Eric Klinenberg come up with an eclectic inventory of love in the modern-day world by means of a mash-up of short stories, jokes, photos, chat screens, statistical graphs, and memes.

Back to my own situation: would our young ambidextrous hero gain more lyricism, better ability to tell a story, in the throes of his career in Letters? Would he be able to *sound* distinct? Those were the years of my band Autopista Sur [South Highway] and the record *Caracas se quema* [Caracas is Burning] (2008), an experiment between friends with electric guitars and literary songs. Perhaps it was naive of me not to foresee that I would hang up my instrument in order to sit down to write something longer with my left hand. And once finished with my left, to use my right, as happens only to those who "write" with both hands.

Translated from the Spanish by Kelsi Vanada